Council defers proposed tough open container law

By MIKE DUNNE
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A proposed tough open container law banning anyone from drinking alcohol in a vehicle didn’t have the necessary votes for passage and was deferred for two weeks.

Councilman Ben Peabody, who is pushing the law with the backing of Mayor Screen, said there are some compromises and changes in the works which should garner more support.

Three council members were out of town and that gave opponents the upper hand in the matter as it was proposed.

The council also deferred action on the beer league for their own meeting.

"Some of the council members expressed some concern and we’ll make some concessions," Peabody said of the container law after the council meeting.

There are possibilities that only the

driver will be the target of the new law and not the passengers, Peabody said.

He said questions of how to handle mobile homes and vans must also be clarified.

Peabody said officials are seeking information on fines from other cities and states.

Asked if he thought it would pass on Dec. 4, Peabody said: "I feel positive it will.

Despite opposition from the head of the local beer league, Screen issued a challenge to council members to "put their reputation where their rhetoric has been and vote in favor of the open-container law.

The mayor made the comments in response to the director of the Beer Industry League of Louisiana who has come out against the proposal.

The law would ban any open liquor container from a motor vehicle on a public street. It had been scheduled for a public hearing before the council Wednesday night.

"I hope we’ll see who is going to be responsible to the safety of our city and who is going to be responsible to the beer industry," Screen said prior to the council’s deferral of the matter.

Screen said, "I think we’ve been shooting straight with us for the past three years by putting their reputation where their rhetoric has been and vote in favor of the open-container law.

George Brown, the director of the local beer industry league, said the restrictions under the open-container law "are far too broad and what it is trying to enforce."

He said the law is virtually non-enforceable, infringes on an individual’s rights and probably will encourage more drinking than less.

"I don’t know how they are going to stop people at LSU from drinking," he said. "I guess they can set up a roadblock and arrest everybody," he said.

"It is the majority feeling of the council to protect ourselves from people who are fly-by-night," Bankston said.

"We are not targeting a certain group of people. We appreciate what you do for the community," Wellborn said.

Brown said he heard Brown’s television comments and thought the citizens of the parish could find out which council members are "serious and sincere" about dealing with the problem of drinking driving.

Brown said he was not speaking on behalf of the beer industry, but was speaking out for the citizens of the parish.

Someone drinking in the back seat of a car and not facting the driver operates a car, he said.

A recent stringent DWI law addresses the problem of drunken driving without infringing on the rights of a worker to stop off for a beer and take it with him, Brown said.

On the bingo permit question, several members of Lions Clubs planned to speak on the matter.

But Councilmen Larry Bankston and Doug Wellborn assured them they were not the targets of plans to limit permits.